neil gaiman - michael allred - bryan talbot - mark buckingham

THE SANDMAN™

DC

VERTIGO

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SUGGESTED FOR MATURE READERS

IN THE INN OF THE WORLDS' END, WHICH MAY OR MAY NOT EXIST, DON'T ASK ME, THERE ARE MORE ROOMS THAN I'VE EVER SEEN IN A BAR ANYWHERE.

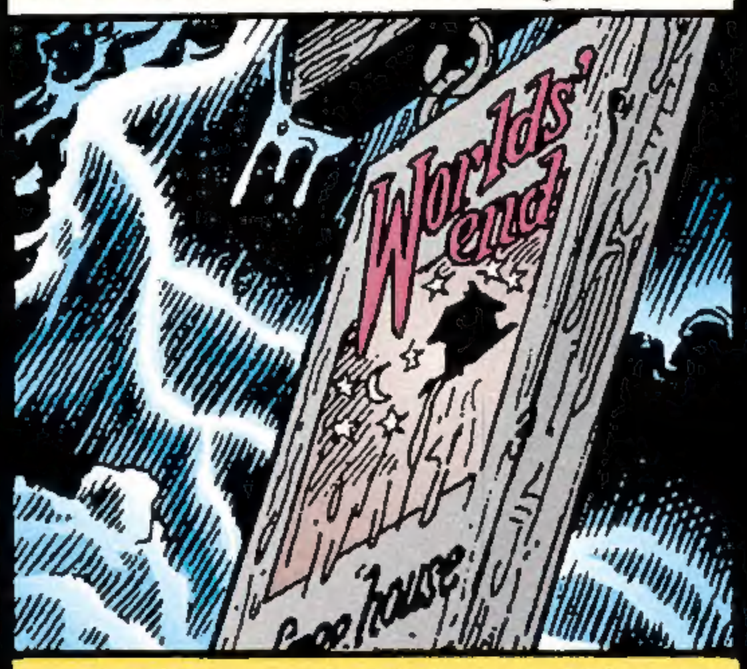
NOT THAT I HANG OUT IN BARS IN THE REAL WORLD.

WHATEVER THAT IS.

("IT'S *NOT* A BAR," THE INNKEEPER TOLD ME, AS SHE SHOWED ME UPSTAIRS. "IT'S AN *INN*.")

I'D BEEN LISTENING TO STORIES ALL NIGHT, WHICH ALSO SEEMED TO HAVE GONE ON MUCH LONGER THAN IT SHOULD HAVE, WHILE THE STORM HOWLED AND SCREAMED AND RUMBLED OUTSIDE, AND SUDDENLY I COULDN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE.

I LAY ON THE BED AND LISTENED TO THE BOOM AND CRASH OF THE THUNDER AND THE HOWL OF THE WIND.



I DON'T KNOW HOW BIG THIS PLACE IS. IF I DIDN'T KNOW ANY BETTER, I'D THINK IT HAD GROWN SINCE I FIRST ARRIVED.

THE INNKEEPER SHOWED ME TO A ROOM UPSTAIRS, WHERE SHE SAID I COULD REST.

I MUST HAVE SLEPT, BUT I HAVE NO IDEA FOR HOW LONG.

WHEN I WOKE UP THERE WAS A CHEESE SANDWICH WAITING FOR ME ON A TRAY BY THE DOOR. THE BREAD WAS NEW-BAKED, AND THE CUP OF COFFEE BESIDE IT WAS PIPING HOT.

TASTED GREAT, TOO.

THE CORRIDOR WAS LIT BY CANDLES, BUT WHERE I REMEMBERED THE STAIRCASE BEING WAS NOW A SMALL ALCOVE, LIKE A LIBRARY.

A FLICKER OF LIGHTNING, AND FOR A MOMENT I THOUGHT I SAW PEOPLE TALKING, MOVING DOWN THE CORRIDOR; BUT THE DARKNESS CAME AGAIN AND THEY WERE GONE.

HELLO.

WHUH?

I, UH, I THOUGHT I WAS ALONE UP HERE.

NO. I ALSO AM HERE. I APOLOGIZE FOR HAVING STARTLED YOU.

'S OKAY. IT'S ONLY COFFEE. IT'LL COME OUT.

I OUGHT TO GET BACK DOWN-STAIRS, I SUPPOSE. I'VE A FRIEND THERE. YOU GET CAUGHT IN THE STORM, TOO?

STORM? NO. I SAW NO STORM.

YOU DIDN'T GET CAUGHT IN A STORM? HOW'D YOU GET HERE?

ON MY WAY TO SOMEWHERE ELSE.

YOU ARE FROM WHERE?

SEATTLE.

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON? IN *AMERICA*? THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA?

UH, *SURE*. OF COURSE. I MEAN, HOW MANY AMERICAS ARE THERE?

MANY. MANY-MANY-MANY. BUT PERHAPS LESS THAN THERE *USED* TO BE. I AM HONORED TO MAKE YOUR ACQUAINTANCE.

THE AMERICA YOU COME FROM. WHO WAS PRESIDENT WHEN YOU LEFT?

I DIDN'T LEAVE. OR MAYBE... WELL. CLINTON. BILL CLINTON.

AND BEFORE HIM?

GEORGE BUSH.

AH. AND BEFORE BUSH, REAGAN, AND BEFORE HIM... *WHO*?

JIMMY CARTER.

AH, YOU COME FROM ONE OF *THOSE* AMERICAS. YOU HAVE MY SYMPATHY.

GEE. THANKS. SO IF YOU AREN'T HIDING OUT FROM THE STORM, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

I AM A SEEKER. I AM A FOLLOWER...

"LET ME TELL YOU OF THE ONE I FOLLOW.

HIS MOTHER UNDERSTOOD THAT NAMES HAVE POWER. NAMES DO NOT DEFINE US, BUT THEY INFLUENCE US FOR GOOD OR ILL, HELP TO SHAPE AND FORM US.

PERHAPS SHE SAW A LITTLE OF THE FUTURE THAT DAY, PERHAPS SHE WAS MERELY INSPIRED BY A HIGHER POWER.

AND SHE NAMED HER NEWBORN...

PREZ-- IT'S SHORT FOR PRESIDENT.

The Golden Boy

Neil Gaiman, writer
Michael Allred, artist pgs. 3–24
Bryan Talbot, penciller pgs. 1, 2 & 24
Mark Buckingham, inker pgs. 1, 2 & 24
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the SANDMAN
Featuring characters created by Gaiman, Kieth & Dringenberg
Prez created by Joe Simon and Jerry Grandenetti

THE BOY BORE HIS NAME WITH PRIDE.

EACH MORNING HE WOULD RECITE THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE. OTHER CHILDREN WOULD RISE AND SPEAK, BUT HE KNEW THAT FOR THEM THE PLEDGE WAS MERELY WORDS AND SOUNDS, LIKE THE ALPHABET.

FOR THE CHILD PREZ RICKARD, EACH MORNING WAS A MOMENT OF DEDICATION, OF MAGIC, WITH ALL HIS HEART AND MIND AND SOUL, HE WOULD PLEDGE HIMSELF TO SOMETHING LARGER THAN HIMSELF.

WHEN PREZ WAS SIX, PRESIDENT KENNEDY TOLD THE AMERICAN PEOPLE NOT TO ASK WHAT THEIR COUNTRY COULD DO FOR THEM, BUT INSTEAD TO ASK WHAT THEY COULD DO FOR THEIR COUNTRY.

PREZ RICKARD KNEW THAT ALREADY.

MY PEOPLE HAVE, OF OLD, DIVIDED THE WORLD INTO TWO KINDS OF PEOPLE: HEDGEHOGS AND FOXES. HEDGEHOGS KNOW ONE BIG THING. FOXES KNOW LOTS OF LITTLE THINGS.

PREZ RICKARD KNEW TWO BIG THINGS.

ONE OF THEM WAS AMERICA, THE OTHER WAS TIME.

THE TOWN OF STEADFAST WAS FAMED FOR ITS CLOCKS: EVERY HOUSE, EVERY STORE, EVERY STEEPLE AND PUBLIC BUILDING BOASTED ITS OWN CLOCK, THAT CHIMED OR BOOMED OR SANG THE HOURS AND HALF HOURS.

JACKSON JEWELERS

JEWELERS

OPTOMETRISTS

SADLY, NO TWO CLOCKS IN STEADFAST AGREED.

WHEN PREZ WAS THIRTEEN, HIS MOTHER LOST SIGHT OF HIM IN THE CENTER OF STEADFAST.

SHE FOUND HIM SOME HOURS LATER, IN THE TOWN HALL, TALKING WITH THE CITY LEADERS ABOUT CIVICS, ANSWERING THEIR QUESTIONS WITH A DEPTH AND PERSPICACITY THAT AMAZED HIS ELDERS.

WHEN HE WAS 16 PREZ FIXED AND ADJUSTED, SINGLE-HANDEDLY, EVERY CLOCK IN STEADFAST.

PEACE AND LOVE PARTY TAKES CALIFORNIA

THAT WAS THE SAME YEAR CONGRESS GAVE 18-YEAR-OLDS THE VOTE.

FIRST TEEN SENATOR SAYS "COOL IT!"

INEVITABLY, THE MASS OF 18-YEAR-OLDS VOTED TO LOWER THE AGE LIMIT ON ELECTED OFFICIALS, AND VOTED THEMSELVES INTO THE SENATE, INTO CONGRESS, AND THEN, THE FOLLOWING YEAR, AND TO NO ONE'S SURPRISE, THEY LOWERED THE AGE LIMIT ON THE PRESIDENCY TO 18.

COOL IT, DUDES!

THE PRINCE OF THAT WORLD WAS BOSS SMILEY.

BOSS SMILEY'S FACE WAS EVERYWHERE IN THAT WORLD. MOST PEOPLE THOUGHT HIM A DREAM, OR A GHOST, BUT THEY CARRIED HIS LIKENESS ON THEM FOR LUCK OR FOR HAPPINESS.

WHEN PREZ WAS 18, BOSS SMILEY CAME TO STEADFAST.

YOU'RE PREZ RICKARD.

UH... YES. HI.

PREZ, BOY, I WILL SHOW YOU ALL THE CITIES AND STATES OF AMERICA.

THEY CAN ALL BE YOURS IF YOU WALK WITH ME, AND TALK FOR A LITTLE WHILE.

PREZ WALKED WITH BOSS SMILEY, THEN, TO A HIGH PLACE.

BOSS SMILEY SHOWED HIM ALL OF AMERICA, FROM DISNEYLAND TO CONEY ISLAND, FROM THE CONCRETE MOUNTAINS OF MANHATTAN TO THE GOLF COURSES OF MIAMI.

I'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR A BRIGHT LAD. AND IT'S TIME. THEY SAID A CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM, AND YOU ARE, WHAT?

HOW OLD?

JUST EIGHTEEN, SIR.

VERY GOOD.

WELL, WHAT DO YOU THINK? DO YOU WANT TO BE PRESI-DENT?

MORE THAN ANYTHING.

VERY GOOD. THEN I SHALL MAKE IT HAPPEN.

"VOTE FOR PREZ--HE'LL ALWAYS GIVE YOU THE RIGHT TIME..."

YOU WILL BE PRESIDENT OF AMERICA--THE YOUNGEST IN HISTORY. AND IN RETURN...

YES, SIR?

IN RETURN, JUST REMEMBER WHO YOU OWE IT ALL TO. REMEMBER WHOSE WORLD THIS IS. KNOW WHO'S BOSS.

IT'S A KIND OFFER, SIR.

AND?

I WILL BE PRESIDENT, SIR. BUT I WILL DO IT IN MY OWN WAY, AND IN MY OWN TIME.

NO, THANK YOU, BOSS SMILEY.

PREZ RICKARD WALKED AWAY, THEN.

HE JUST SMILED.

AND BOSS SMILEY...

Newsweek

...E THE ...S RUN ON TIME.

IN THE MONTHS THAT FOLLOWED, PREZ RICKARD FELL EVER HIGHER. HE WORKED HARD IN LOCAL POLITICS. HE MADE THE COVER OF *NEWSWEEK* MAGAZINE (IT WAS A SLOW NEWS WEEK). JOHNNY CARSON CRACKED A JOKE ABOUT HIM ON THE *TONIGHT* SHOW.

PREZ WOKE ONE NIGHT TO FIND THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES IN HIS BEDROOM.

SO ***YOU'RE*** PREZ RICKARD, HUH?

UH... YES.

YOU, UH, ***YOU*** DON'T LOOK SO MUCH.

YOU'RE GOING TO BE THE NEXT PRESIDENT, YOU KNOW THAT?

SIR...?

OH, ***DON'T*** COME ON ALL WIDE-EYED AND INNOCENT WITH ME, KID. IT'LL ***HAP***PEN. I, UH, I GOT THE WORD DOWN FROM ON HIGH ALREADY. THEY ***TELL*** YOU STUFF, WHEN YOU'RE PRESI-DENT. ***YOU'LL*** LEARN.

NOW, I'M GOING TO TELL YOU A FEW THINGS NOW, MAKE IT EASY FOR YOU IN THE FUTURE.

OKAY: ***NOTHING*** YOU DO IN THE WHITE HOUSE MATTERS.

YOU KNOW WHY ***NOT?*** BECAUSE AS FAR AS THE MASS OF VOTING MORONS IS CONCERNED, WHILE YOU'RE IN OFFICE, YOU'LL BE THE ***WORST*** SINGLE PRESIDENT THEY'VE EVER HAD. UNTIL YOU STOP.

THEN IT'S SOME ***OTHER*** POOR BASTARD'S TURN.

AND EVEN ***THAT*** DOESN'T MATTER, BECAUSE TEN, TWENTY YEARS LATER, THEY'LL LOOK BACK ON YOU, AND WONDER ***WHY*** THEY DIDN'T APPRECIATE YOU WHEN THEY ***HAD*** YOU.

IN HINDSIGHT EVEN WARREN GAMALIEL HARDING LOOKS GOOD. YOU, UH, FOLLOWING ME?

I WANT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE, SIR.

YOU DON'T ***GET*** TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE. YOU DON'T GET TO DO JACK ***SHIT***. YOU KNOW WHAT YOU GET?

SIR?

YOU GET AN ENTRY IN THE HISTORY BOOK, AND EVERY 15 MINUTES, EVERY DAY AT DISNEYWORLD, AN ANIMATRONIC PUPPET WEARING YOUR FACE WILL WAVE OR NOD--

--WHEN THE SPOTLIGHT HITS IT.

SO TAKE IT FOR WHAT YOU CAN GET, KID, AND MILK IT FOR ALL IT'S *WORTH*. IT'S YOUR MOMENT IN THE SPOTLIGHT.

SIR.

I DON'T KNOW IF I'LL *EVER* BE PRESIDENT OR NOT. BUT I *AM* GOING TO DO EVERYTHING I CAN TO BE PRESIDENT...

THAT'S A SMART KID. *POWER*. THAT'S THE ONLY THING WORTH GOING FOR. FOR*GET* MONEY. POWER COMES WITH MONEY.

FOR*GET* CHASING SKIRTS. YOU GOT POWER, THE SKIRTS CHASE *YOU*. EVEN THAT DUMB [expletive deleted] JACK KENNEDY. EVEN *HE* KNEW THAT.

SIR? WHAT ABOUT MAKING THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE?

I, UH... I'M NOT FOLLOWING YOU.

IF I'M PRESIDENT, I WANT TO MAKE A *DIFFERENCE*. I WANT TO TRY AND MAKE IT EASIER FOR PEOPLE TO LIVE. TO HEAL THE DIVIDE BETWEEN RICH AND POOR, BETWEEN BLACK AND WHITE, THE POSSESSORS AND THE DISPOSSESSED.

I WANT TO MAKE AMERICA THE KIND OF PLACE I *DREAMED* IT WAS, AS A KID. MAKE IT SOMEPLACE TO INSPIRE THE REST OF THE WORLD--A DREAM OF FREEDOM; A CELEBRATION OF LIFE, LIBERTY AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS.

AH...

WELL, I BETTER BE RUNNING ALONG. NICE MEETING YOU, PREZ RICKARD.

NICE TO MEET YOU *TOO*, MISTER PRESIDENT.

AND PREZ RICKARD ROLLED OVER AND WENT BACK TO SLEEP.

ON ELECTION DAY THERE WERE A NUMBER OF MAGNIFICENT OMENS REPORTED.

A BABY WAS BORN TO A COUPLE IN NEW HAVEN, CT., WITH A BIRTHMARK IN THE SHAPE OF THE *USA* ON HER BACK, LACKING ONLY HAWAII AND ALASKA.

DURING A 42ND STREET SCREENING OF *HOT TEENAGE LOVE SLUTS*, THE CLIMACTIC SEX SCENE WAS INTERRUPTED BY THE COUPLE REPLACING THEIR CLOTHES AND PERFORMING HIGHLIGHTS FROM *GUYS AND DOLLS* TO AN OUTRAGED AUDIENCE.

IN CAESAR'S PALACE, LAS VEGAS, EVERY SLOT MACHINE IN THE BUILDING BESTOWED ITS JACKPOT SIMULTANEOUSLY.

IN ADDITION, MANY BLIND PEOPLE REGAINED THEIR SIGHT, DEAF PEOPLE REGAINED THEIR HEARING, AND AN UNCOUNTABLE NUMBER OF ORGANIC OR HYSTERICAL ILLNESSES, SOME OF A TERMINAL NATURE, SPONTANEOUSLY VANISHED, NEVER TO RETURN.

PENCILS 5¢

I'M BLIND PLEASE HELP

AND PREZ RICKARD WAS ELECTED PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

PREZ USA

HE WAS THREE MONTHS SHY OF HIS TWENTIETH BIRTHDAY.

THAT PREZ RICKARD WAS A GOOD PRESIDENT SURPRISED MANY. THAT HE WAS A GREAT PRESIDENT SURPRISED ALMOST EVERYONE.

IN HIS FIRST YEAR IN THE PRESIDENCY, HE INITIATED TALKS IN THE MIDDLE EAST, AND AVERTED THE LOOMING "ENERGY CRISIS".

LATER THAT YEAR, THE MAJOR OIL COMPANIES LOWERED THE PRICE OF GASOLINE.

HE BEGAN TO REDUCE BOTH THE FEDERAL DEFICIT AND THE NATIONAL DEBT.

HE HOSTED AN EPISODE OF *SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE* WHICH GARNERED THE HIGHEST RATINGS OF ANY COMEDY SHOW TO DATE --

--APPEARING IN A NUMBER OF SKETCHES WITH THE "*NOT READY FOR PRIME TIME PLAYERS*".

IN HIS LATER YEARS, JOHN BELUSHI WAS TO DESCRIBE IT AS "THE MOST INSPIRING EXPERIENCE OF HIS LIFE."

YEAH? WELL, I SUPPOSE PREZ SHOWED ME YOU DIDN'T NEED TO BE F**KED UP TO WORK AT YOUR PEAK. I MEAN, HERE'S THIS GUY WORKING EIGHTEEN HOURS A DAY, FATE OF THE FREE WORLD *DEPENDS* ON HIM. AND HE'S *CLEAN*, Y'KNOW? *THAT* WAS *SCARY*.

THE PRESIDENT'S APPROACH TO THE ARMS RACE WAS CONTROVERSIAL.

HE EXPLAINED IT ON INTERNATIONAL TELEVISION.

RIGHT *NOW*, THE *U.S. ALONE* HAS ENOUGH NUCLEAR WEAPONRY TO DESTROY THE WORLD A HUNDRED TIMES OVER. I MEAN, THAT'S *DUMB*, Y'KNOW.

SO WE'RE *NOT* GOING TO *MAKE* ANY MORE NUCLEAR OR BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS -- SIMPLE AS THAT.

AND WE'RE FIGURING OUT WAYS TO GET *RID* OF THE ONES WE'VE ALREADY GOT, SAFELY.

BUT, MISTER PRESIDENT. WHAT ABOUT THE *RUSSIANS*?

LISTEN, THE RUSSIANS HAVE THEIR *OWN* PROBLEMS. THEY'RE *HUNGRY* AND THEY'RE *SCARED*. I THINK WE SHOULD PUT OUR *OWN* HOUSE IN ORDER FIRST.

THERE WAS DOUBT AS TO WHETHER HE'D BE ABLE TO PUSH THE BILL THROUGH CONGRESS. BUT HE MANAGED.

PREZ COULD DO *ANYTHING*.

DURING THE FIRST TERM OF HIS PRESIDENCY, PREZ PROVED HIMSELF A REMARKABLE LEADER. HE WAS THE GOLDEN BOY, THE WONDER-CHILD. HE HAD A VISION OF WHAT HE NEEDED AMERICA TO BE, AND HE SHOVED, GOADED, FORCED AND COAXED AMERICA TOWARD HIS VISION.

AND IN THE THIRD YEAR OF HIS PRESIDENCY, BOSS SMILEY CAME TO HIM ONCE MORE.

YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING MIGHTY FINE, DON'T YOU, PREZ?

HELLO, SMILEY. YES. I'VE MADE A START.

A START? YOU'VE DONE MORE FOR THE WORLD THAN ANY OTHER PRESIDENT HISTORY.

NO. BUT I'VE MADE A START.

SO YOU'RE GOING TO RUN AGAIN?

CERTAINLY I'M GOING TO RUN AGAIN.

BOSS SMILEY, I'VE ASKED THE *CIA* AND THE *FBI* FOR THEIR FILES ON YOU. I'VE ASKED THE *IRS* AND INTERPOL.

DID THEY MAKE INTERESTING READING?

THERE *AREN'T* ANY FILES. THEY ALL SAY YOU DON'T EXIST. NO RECORDS. NO BIRTH DATE. NOTHING BUT RUMORS.

WELL, PREZ BOY, *THAT'S* AS IT *SHOULD* BE.

YOU KNOW, IT MIGHT NOT BE HEALTHY FOR YOU TO RUN AGAIN.

ARE YOU *THREATENING* ME?

HOW CAN YOU BE THREATENED BY A MAN WHO DOESN'T EXIST?

THAT NOVEMBER, THE DEMOCRATS FIELDED AN EIGHTEEN-YEAR-OLD FOOTBALL PLAYER, THE REPUBLICANS AN AGEING MOVIE ACTOR.

THE ELECTION RESULT SURPRISED NO ONE.

FOUR MORE YEARS

PREZ

MAYBE WE'VE GOT THE BEST SYSTEM IN THE WORLD, AND MAYBE WE HAVEN'T. BUT I'M DELIGHTED TO HAVE THE HONOR OF SERVING YOU ALL FOR ANOTHER FOUR YEARS.

I *THINK* I'M STARTING TO GET THE *HANG* OF IT.

THAT WAS THE YEAR HE UN-SNARLED THE JAPANESE-AMERICAN TRADE AGREEMENT,

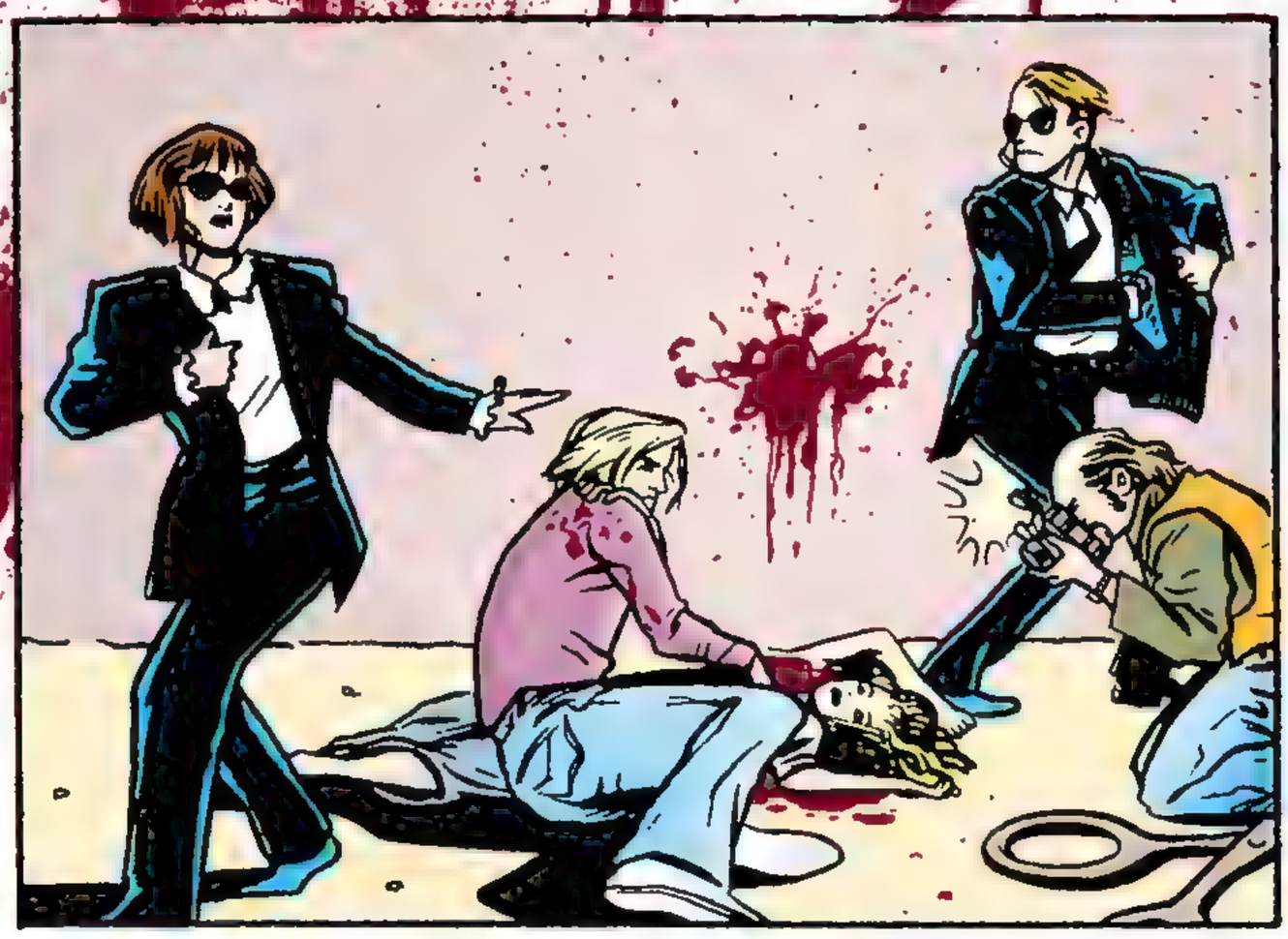
THAT HE PERSONALLY LED AN INVESTIGATION INTO INDUS-TRIAL POLLUTION (WHICH RESULTED IN THE IMPRISON-MENT OF THE BOARDS OF DIRECTORS OF TWO OF AMERICA'S LARGEST CORPORATIONS),

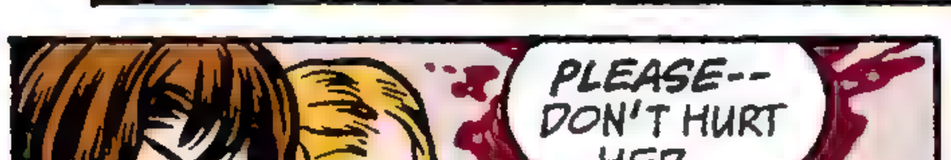
AND IN WHICH HE DECLARED EDUCATION THE HIGHEST PRIORITY IN AMERICA.

IT WAS ALSO THE YEAR THAT HE BEGAN SEEING HIS HIGH SCHOOL SWEETHEART AGAIN, ON A SEMI-REGULAR BASIS.

PREZ AND KATHY ANNOUNCED THEIR ENGAGEMENT LATE THE FOLLOWING YEAR, AT A PRESS CONFERENCE IN STOCKHOLM, AFTER PREZ HAD, A LITTLE AWKWARDLY, ACCEPTED THE NOBEL PEACE PRIZE.

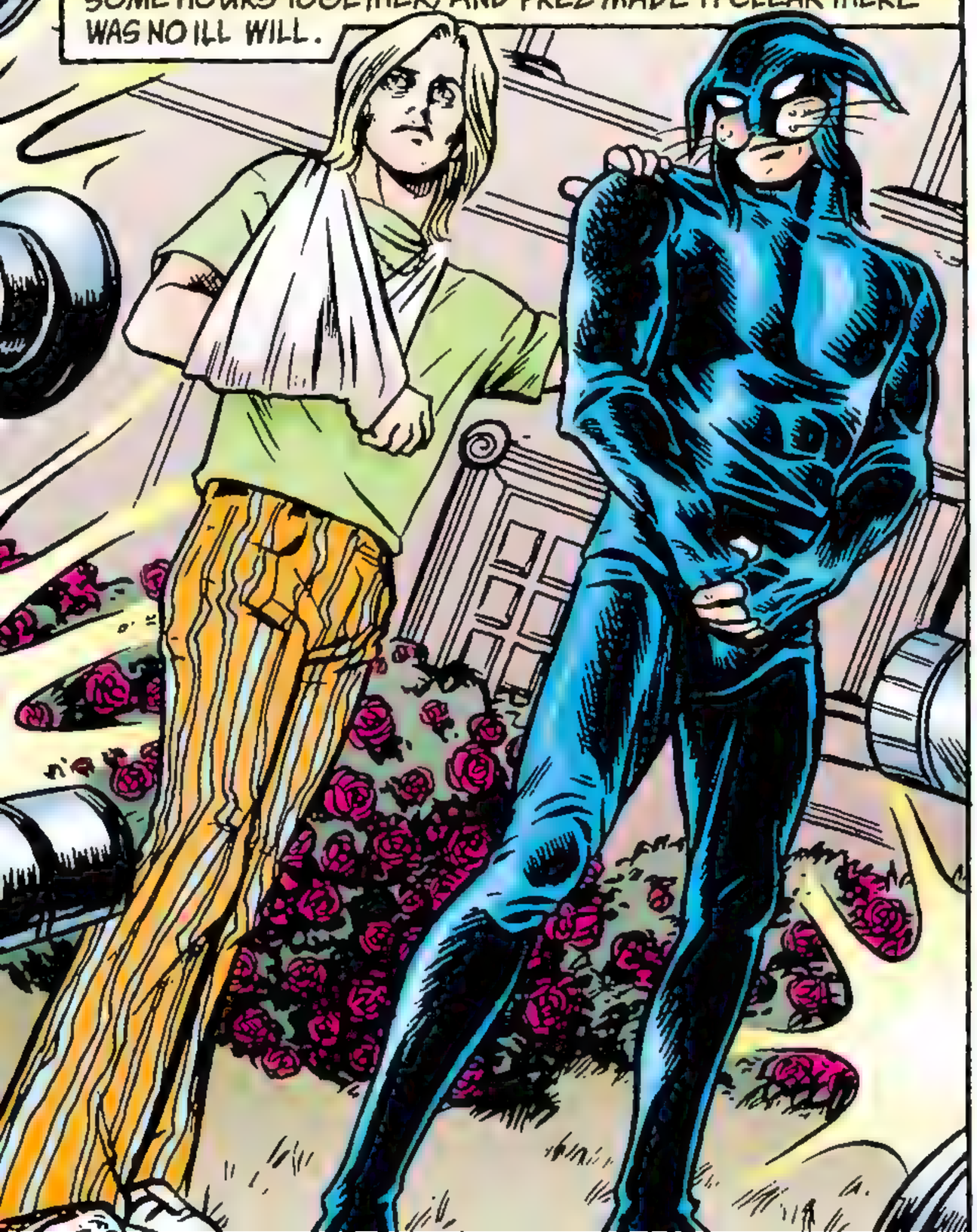
FOR THE NEXT FEW MONTHS THEY WENT EVERYWHERE TOGETHER, DID EVERYTHING TOGETHER. IT WAS A STORYBOOK ROMANCE.



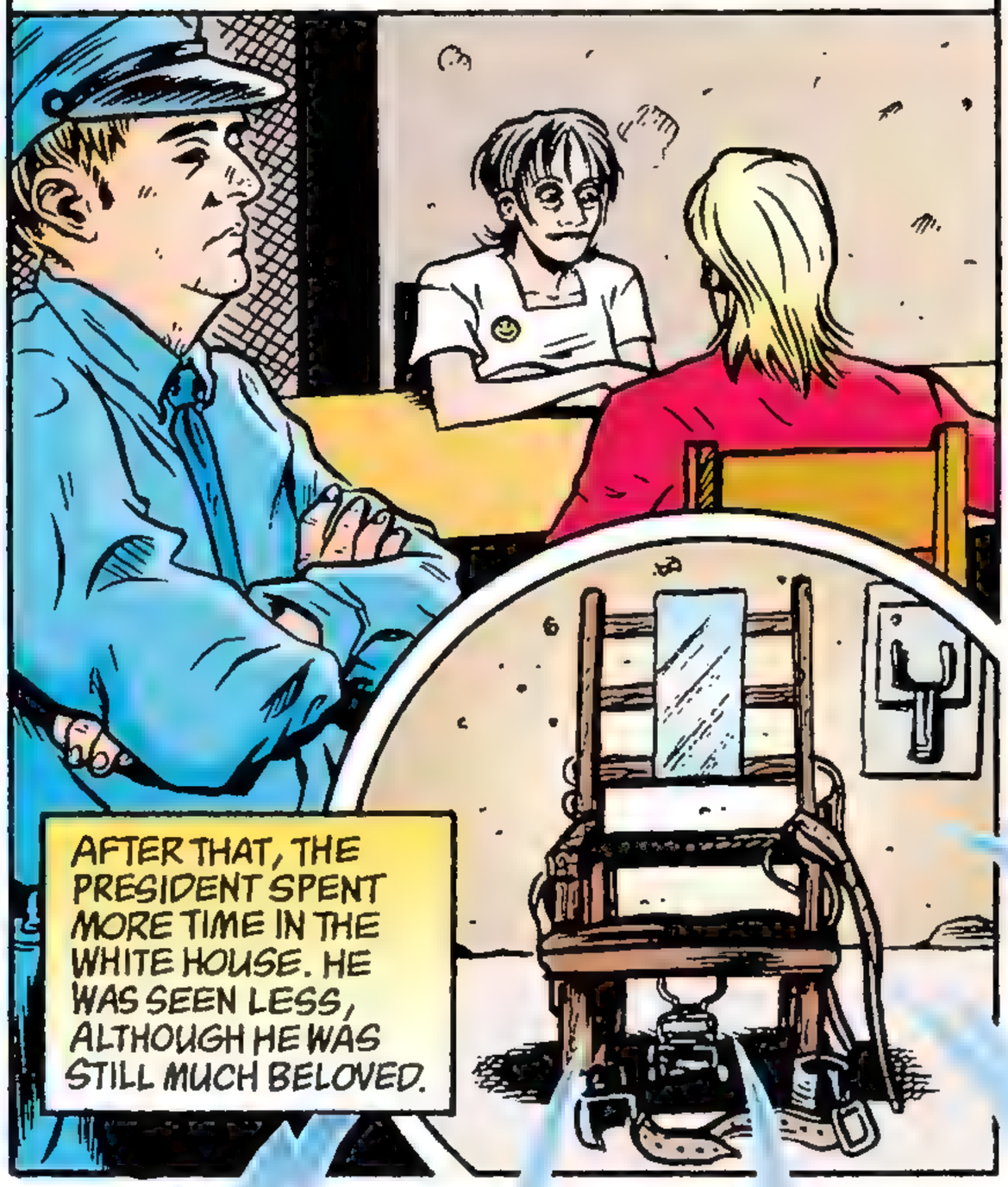


THE PERSON WHO KILLED KATHY, AND WOUNDED PREZ, TURNED OUT TO BE A WOMAN OBSESSED WITH PROMINENT TELEVISION PERSONALITY, AND FORMER BOXER, TED GRANT.

WHEN HE CAME OUT OF THE HOSPITAL, PRESIDENT RICKARD MADE A POINT OF SENDING FOR TED GRANT. THEY SPENT SOME HOURS TOGETHER, AND PREZ MADE IT CLEAR THERE WAS NO ILL WILL.



ALSO HE WENT TO SEE THE WOMAN WHO KILLED HIS WIFE-TO-BE, IN HER CELL, BUT NO RECORD OF THEIR CONVERSATION EXISTS; SAVE IT IS KNOWN THAT HE OFFERED HER CLEMENCY, AND SHE STILL WENT TO THE ELECTRIC CHAIR.



AFTER THAT, THE PRESIDENT SPENT MORE TIME IN THE WHITE HOUSE. HE WAS SEEN LESS, ALTHOUGH HE WAS STILL MUCH BELOVED.

I THINK I'LL CALL IT A NIGHT, NOW, MARTHA.

YOU DO THAT.

WHAT'S ON THE SCHEDULE FOR TOMORROW?

YOU'VE A BREAKFAST BRIEFING WITH THE STATE DEPARTMENT AT 7:00, AND A MEETING WITH THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR AT 9:15 TO GO OVER THE ALGERIAN PROBLEM. 10:30 YOU'RE TALKING TO THE MARS SHUTTLE CREW ON VIDEO LINK-UP...

PREZ?

YES, MARTHA.

DID YOU JUST HEAR A *WORD* I WAS SAYING?

NO, MARTHA.

PREZ, BOY, YOU REALLY *DO* NEED TO GO GET YOURSELF SOME SLEEP.

I'M SORRY.

WHY HELLO, PRESIDENT PREZ RICKARD.

HELLO, BOSS SMILEY.

WELL, YOUNGSTER, I HEAR YOUR WIFE-TO-BE IS DEAD.

YES. SHE WAS KILLED.

YOU KNOW, IT DISTRESSED ME *MIGHTILY* TO HEAR ABOUT YOUR SUFFERING. AND I RACKED MY BRAINS TO TRY TO COME UP WITH A SOLUTION.

AND EVENTUALLY, I *DID*.

THIS IS YOUR LAST TERM, ISN'T IT? NOT MUCH TO LOSE, NOT MUCH TO WIN. CAN'T RUN AGAIN, AFTER ALL. BUT *SERVE* ME, AND I'LL BRING HER *BACK* TO YOU.

YOU'RE *CRAZY*, BOSS SMILEY. KATHY'S DEAD.

CAMERA *THREE*? CAN WE GO OVER TO CAMERA THREE?

HI? *PREZ*? CAN YOU *SEE* ME? IT'S REALLY *DARK* IN HERE.

HONEY? I'M *COLD*. I MISS YOU *SO* MUCH...

HELLO?

YOU SERVE ME, BOY, AND SHE'LL BE BACK IN YOUR BED AND IN YOUR LIFE, SWEET AS *ANYTHING*.

I SERVE ONLY THE AMERICAN PEOPLE. THIS IS A *DREAM*. I'VE FALLEN ASLEEP WATCHING THE DODGERS GAME. IT'S A DREAM. IT *HAS* TO BE.

KATHY'S *DEAD*, BOSS SMILEY.

HE CLOSED HIS EYES, THEN, AND PUT HIS HANDS OVER HIS EARS.

AND WHEN HE LIFTED HIS HEAD AGAIN, THE SCREEN WAS GRAY AND BLANK, TUNED TO A DEAD CHANNEL, AND THE ROOM WAS DARK.

PREZ RICKARD LAY IN THE PALE BLUE LIGHT OF THE TELEVISION SCREEN, AND HE CRIED SILENTLY INTO THE NIGHT.

HIS SECOND TERM ENDED QUIETLY.

DON'T GO, PREZ!

AMERICA NEEDS PREZ!

WE LOVE YOU!

PREZ- DON'T GO!

PREZ FOREVER!

THERE WERE THOSE WHO PROPOSED THAT THE LAW BE CHANGED TO PERMIT PREZ TO RUN A THIRD TIME; WHILE OTHERS SUGGESTED THAT HE BE DECLARED PRESIDENT IN PERPETUITY.

THERE WAS EVEN A CAMPAIGN, WHICH BEGAN IN SAN FRANCISCO, TO PROCLAIM PREZ RICKARD "EMPEROR OF THE UNITED STATES", BUT MOST PEOPLE RIGHTLY CONSIDERED THIS A JOKE, OF SORTS.

PREZ

DON'T LEAVE US PREZ!

THE TURN OUT AT THE NOVEMBER ELECTION WAS SPECTACULARLY LOW. PEOPLE SEEMED TO FEEL THAT IF THEY COULDN'T VOTE FOR PREZ THEN THEY HAD NO WISH TO VOTE AT ALL.

A NEW PRESIDENT WAS SWORN IN, AND PREZ RICKARD RETIRED TO STEADFAST.

HE LIVED THERE ON HIS OWN, ON A SMALL ESTATE. AND IN THAT PLACE HE PASSED HIS DAYS IN SECLUSION, REPAIRING CLOCKS OF VARIOUS SHAPES AND KINDS.

HE DECLINED ALL INVITATIONS TO JOIN THE BOARDS OF VARIOUS CORPORATIONS, TO GOLF, OR TO WRITE HIS MEMOIRS.

THINGS WERE NO LONGER GOLDEN IN AMERICA.

BAR

IT WASN'T THAT THINGS GOT *BAD*. IT WAS JUST THAT THEY WEREN'T SPECTACULARLY *GOOD* ANY MORE.

THEY SAY THAT THE NEW PRESIDENT SENT MESSENGERS TO HIM, ASKING IF HE WOULD COME OUT OF RETIREMENT, ASKING IF HE WOULD ADVISE, OR AID, OR ASSIST.

PREZ RECEIVED THEM GRACIOUSLY, AND GAVE THEM COFFEE.

NO? THEN LET ME PUT IT *THIS* WAY.

IN THE WHITE HOUSE IS A TIGER SKIN RUG, SHOT AND KILLED MANY YEARS AGO BY TEDDY ROOSEVELT. THE FEET OF THE GREAT WALK OVER THAT TIGER SKIN EACH DAY. IT LISTENS TO POLICY BEING FORMED AND SECRETS BEING SPOKEN.

NOW DO *YOU* THINK THAT TIGER WOULD RATHER BE DEAD AND IN THE SEAT OF POWER, OR ALIVE, AND WALKING THE JUNGLE OF INDIA, SNIFFING THE WIND FOR THE SCENT OF GAME?

"IT WOULD RATHER BE *ALIVE*," THEY SAID.

"AND SO WOULD I," SAID PREZ RICKARD, AND HE SENT THEM AWAY.

SOON AFTER THAT, PREZ LEFT HIS ESTATE IN STEADFAST. HE TOLD NO ONE THAT HE WAS LEAVING, NOR WHERE HE WAS GOING.

NO, I *DON'T* KNOW WHERE HE IS. AND I WOULDN'T TELL YOU IF I DID.

BUT I *DON'T*.

A TRUCKDRIVER REPORTED THAT HE HAD PICKED UP A HITCH-HIKING PREZ IN PORTLAND, OREGON, AND DRIVEN HIM TO BILLINGS, MONTANA. THEY HAD TALKED ABOUT BASEBALL AND OLD TELEVISION COMEDY SHOWS THE ENTIRE WAY.

A WAITRESS IN SHREVEPORT, LOUISIANA, CLAIMED THAT SHE HAD GIVEN BIRTH TO PREZ'S LOVE CHILD;

A BLOOD TEST, HOWEVER, ADMINISTERED BY THE TELEVISION SHOW FROM WHOM SHE HAD DEMANDED HALF A MILLION DOLLARS FOR HER STORY, DISPROVED HER CLAIM.

WAS PREZ KIDNAPPED BY ALIENS?

IS EX-PRESIDENT A HOBO?

PREZ WILL BREAK SILE

$5 MILLION SAYS CLAIRVOYANT

PREZ SIGHTINGS BECOME AS FREQUENT AS ELVIS SIGHTINGS. A *WEEKLY WORLD NEWS* SPECIAL EVEN CONCLUDED THAT THE TWO MEN WERE WORKING TOGETHER TO FIGHT CRIME, ALTHOUGH IT HAD NO EVIDENCE FOR THIS.

THERE WERE OTHER RUMORS, OTHER STORIES, AS THE YEARS WENT BY; TALES OF MARVELS AND OF MIRACLES.

ONE DAY, PREZ DIED.

THE STORIES OF THE DEATH OF PREZ RICKARD WERE AS STRANGE AND CONTRA-DICTORY AS THE STORIES OF HIS LATTER DAYS.

BAK

SOME SAID HE WAS KILLED DURING A HOLD-UP IN A CHICAGO BAKERY--A HOLD-UP NOT FOR MONEY, BUT FOR WARM BREAD TO FEED THE STARVING CHILDREN IN THE SNOW OUTSIDE.

SOME PEOPLE SAID THE WOMAN WHO KILLED HIS KATHY RETURNED TO FINISH OFF THE TASK SHE HAD BEGUN YEARS BEFORE.

AND THESE PEOPLE KNEW THAT THE KILLER HAD IN HER TURN BEEN EXECUTED. BUT STILL, THEY SAID, IT WAS HER.

OTHERS SAID THAT THE CURRENT PRESIDENT ORDERED HIS DEATH.

ANOTHER TALE, CURRENT AT THE TIME, WAS THAT ONE NIGHT HE HAD RETURNED TO HIS HOME IN STEADFAST, AFTER AN ABSENCE OF OVER FIVE YEARS, AND WAS SHOT BY THE SECRET SERVICE MEN WHO STILL GUARDED HIS HOUSE, AND WHO HAD FAILED TO RECOGNIZE HIM.

MANY SAID THEY HAD DREAMED OF PREZ, A VICTIM OF PNEUMO-NIA AND STARVATION, ANONYMOUS-LY JOHN DOE-ING HIS WAY TO THE MORGUE AND FROM THERE TO THE CREMATORIUM.

HOW HE DIED MEANT LITTLE. WHAT WAS BEYOND ANY MANNER OF DOUBT IS THAT THE WORLD KNEW HE WAS GONE.

THERE WAS NOTHING ABOUT IT IN THE NEWS-PAPERS, NO WORD ON TELEVISION.

STILL, ACROSS AMERICA, THE FLAGS FLEW AT HALF-MAST, AND PEOPLE SPOKE IN HUSHED TONES.

PREZ RICKARD WAS NO LONGER SPOKEN OF IN THE PRESENT TENSE.

BLACK ARMBANDS BECAME COMMON-PLACE, AND, DID YOU ASK ANYONE TO TELL YOU WHO THEY WORE THEM FOR THEY WOULD SAY, "FOR PREZ", ALTHOUGH NO ONE COULD TELL YOU FOR SURE HOW THEY KNEW HE WAS DEAD.

SALE

AND THE WORLD CONTINUED ON ITS WAY.

WHAT COMES AFTER IS HEARSAY, A MATTER OF PERSONAL BELIEF AND REVELATION.

LET US SAY THAT IT IS WHAT I BELIEVE HAPPENED TO PREZ RICKARD, AFTER HE DIED.

HI PREZ.

UH... HELLO.

HAVE WE MET BEFORE?

ONCE.

AH. I'M SORRY. IT'S JUST I'VE MET SO MANY PEOPLE...

ME TOO. BUT I REMEMBER YOU.

HANG ON. LOOK. THIS MAY BE A REALLY STUPID QUESTION, BUT AM I..?

WOW.

UH-HUH. AS A DODO.

SO WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

OH, DIFFERENT THINGS TO DIFFERENT PEOPLE. IT DEPENDS WHO YOU ARE.

AND YOU NEVER GET TO LEARN WHAT HAPPENS TO ANYONE ELSE.

BUT YOU?

WELL, YOU'RE KIND OF A SPECIAL CASE, ANYWAY.

HOW DO YOU MEAN?

WELL...

THERE'S SOMEONE WAITING TO TALK TO YOU. THOSE PEOPLE OVER THERE ARE GOING TO *TAKE* YOU TO HIM.

WOW. THERE REALLY *IS* A WATCHMAKER, HUH?

A WATCH-MAKER?

IT WAS SOMETHING THEY TOLD ME AT SCHOOL.

I'VE NEVER FORGOTTEN.

IF YOU *FIND* A WATCH IN A DESERT, YOU DON'T ASSUME IT WAS SPONTANEOUSLY CREATED. YOU FIGURE SOME-ONE *MADE* IT. THAT THERE'S A WATCHMAKER.

AND IF THE WATCH HAS STOPPED, THEN YOU REPAIR IT.

I DON'T THINK THIS GUY *MADE* THE WATCH, PREZ. HE JUST RUNS THE LOCAL FRANCHISE.

BUT *YOU'LL* FIND OUT.

HEY--GOOD LUCK. I CAN'T HELP THINKING... MAYBE I OUGHT TO...

WELL. NEVER MIND. YOU'LL BE *FINE*, PREZ.

THANK YOU, MA'AM.

HELLO, PREZ RICKARD.

YOU?

WELL DONE, THOU GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT.

I NEVER WORKED FOR YOU.

OF COURSE YOU WORKED FOR ME.

SO YOU GOT TO BE PRESIDENT. WELL, YOU SERVED YOUR TWO TERMS, AND THAT WAS THAT. NOW IT'S BUSINESS AS USUAL.

YOU'VE GONE AWAY FROM THE WORLD. YOU'RE BECOMING A MYTHICAL FIGURE, PREZ. YOU'RE ALREADY A SYMBOL OF A MORE INNOCENT TIME.

AND YOU'RE DEAD, INTO THE BARGAIN. YOU HAVE TO BE ALIVE TO BE PRESIDENT. ONE OF THE RULES.

SO WHAT *ARE* YOU? GOD? OR THE DEVIL?

I'M JUST BOSS SMILEY. I RUN YOUR WORLD.

SO THAT GIRL WAS RIGHT. YOU'RE *NOT* THE WATCHMAKER.

IF ONLY.

AND KATHY?

SHE'S... NOT *HERE* ANY-MORE. SHE WENT AWAY.

SO THERE *ARE* OTHER WORLDS?

I BELIEVE SO. BUT *THIS* IS THE ONLY SIGNIFICANT ONE.

AND OTHER AMERICAS?

I THINK THAT GOES WITHOUT SAYING. NOW, PREZ RICKARD, LET US DISCUSS IMPORTANT MATTERS. I THINK, TO BEGIN WITH, YOU SHOULD SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, AND SING PRAISES. HOSANNA. IN EXCELSIS GLORIA.

YOU'LL SOON GET THE HANG OF IT.

SO THERE'S A WHOLE DESERT FILLED WITH BROKEN WATCHES?

BOSS SMILEY. I DON'T THINK I'LL STAY AROUND AND SING HOSANNAS. I THINK I'LL BE GOING OFF TO LOOK AT AMERICAS.

MUST BE ONE OF THEM NEEDS A PREZ. MUST BE ONE OF THEM NEEDS FIXING.

YOU AREN'T GOING ANYWHERE. YOU'RE DEAD. YOU'RE MINE.

He may go wherever he wants.

THIS IS MY WORLD. I RULE HERE. YOU HAVE NO POWER HERE. LEAVE THIS PLACE--NOW!

SIR? WHO ARE YOU?

Just one with an... interest... in tales.

I AM PRINCE OF THIS WORLD.

And I am Prince of Stories. The boy is under my jurisdiction, not yours.

Come with me, Prez Rickard.

I CAN DESTROY YOU.

I WILL DESTROY BOTH OF YOU!

YOU COME BACK HERE!

HE SAID HE'D DESTROY YOU. I HOPE I HAVEN'T GOT YOU INTO ANY KIND OF TROUBLE.

He would not be the first to threaten me. But I have no fear of Boss Smiley. And you are under my protection.

So you need not worry.

DO I... DO I OWE YOU ANY-THING, SIR?

You owe my sister thanks. She drew my attention to your situation. But, no. You owe me nothing.

That gateway will take you where you need to go.

SIR?

Yes, young man?

I... I DON'T REALLY REMEMBER MY FATHER. WHEN I THINK OF HIM, I REMEMBER HIS POCKET WATCH, A HUGE, SILVER REPEATER THAT CHIMED THE HOURS AND THE HALF HOURS. HE LEFT IT TO ME WHEN HE DIED. I WAS *FOUR*.

IT DIDN'T WORK, THOUGH.

WHEN I WAS EIGHT I TOOK A BOOK ON WATCHMAKING OUT OF THE LIBRARY.

THERE WERE A LOT OF TOOLS I NEEDED THAT I DIDN'T *HAVE*. I SAVED MY ALLOWANCE FOR SIX MONTHS, AND TOOK A PAPER ROUTE TO GET THE MONEY FOR A SECOND HAND SET OF WATCHMAKING TOOLS.

DIDN'T DARE START ON THIS WATCH. INSTEAD I PRACTICED ON AN OLD WATCH--MUST'VE TAKEN IT APART AND PUT IT BACK TOGETHER A *DOZEN* TIMES.

AND THEN, ONE DAY, I REPAIRED DAD'S OLD WATCH. IT'S BEEN RUNNING FINE EVER SINCE. AND I HAD TO LOOK AROUND FOR *MORE* WATCHES TO FIX...

SIR? I WANT YOU TO HAVE THIS.

AND PREZ RICKARD WALKED THROUGH DREAM'S DOOR, AWAY FROM BOSS SMILEY'S HEAVEN AND OUT ACROSS THE WORLDS.

"SOME SAY THAT HE STILL WALKS BETWEEN THE WORLDS, TRAVELLING FROM AMERICA TO AMERICA, HELP TO THE HELPLESS, A SHELTER FOR THE WEAK."

OTHERS SAY THAT HE WAITS TO BE BORN ONCE MORE, AND THAT THIS TIME HE WILL NOT COME JUST TO ONE AMERICA, BUT TO ALL OF THEM.

AND I WALK THE WORLDS, FOLLOWING HIM, SEEKING HIM, WALKING AHEAD...

SPREADING HIS WORD.

AND WHEN HE COMES BACK--

--WHEREVER, WHENEVER HE COMES BACK--

--I WILL BE WAITING.

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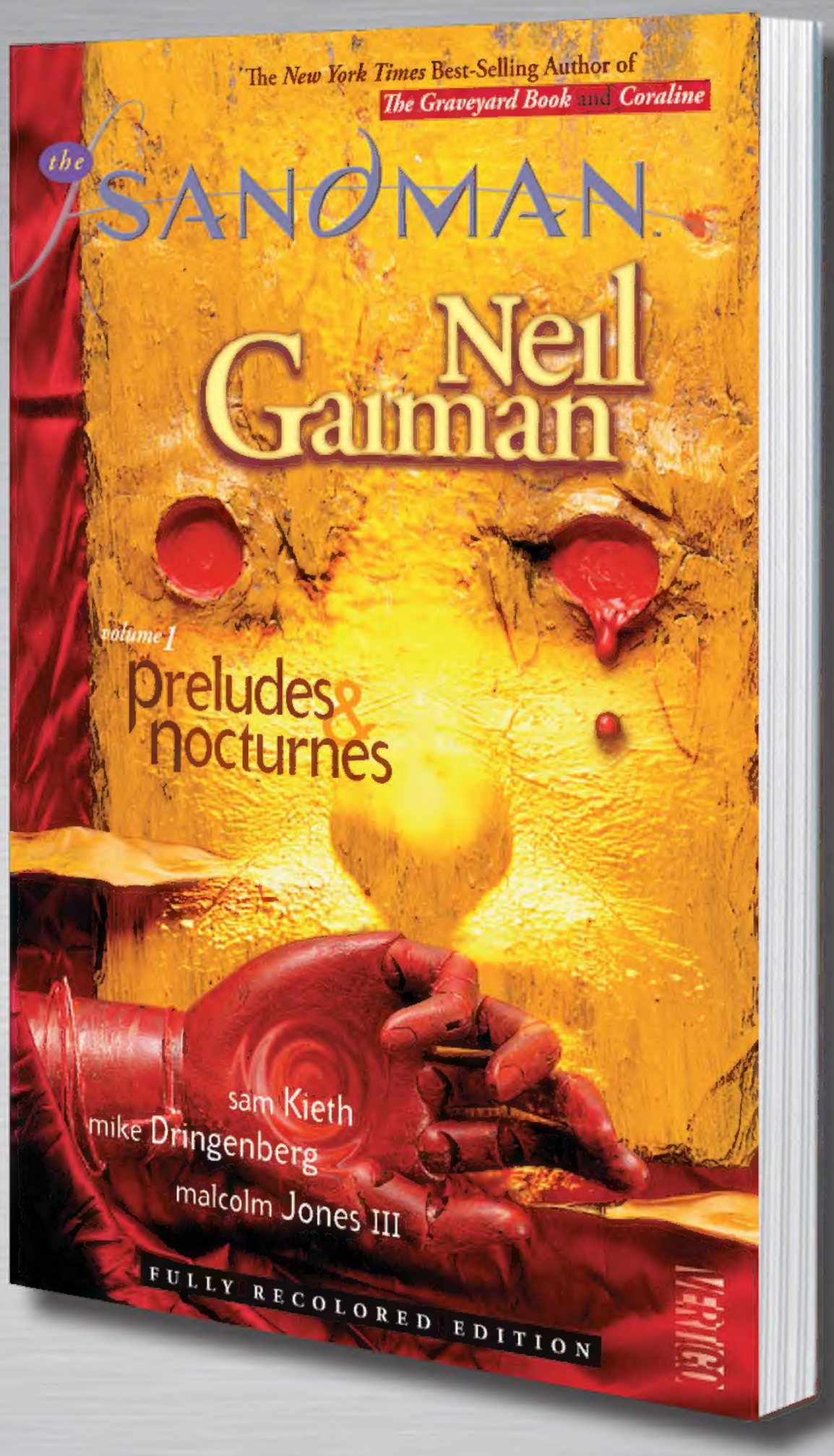

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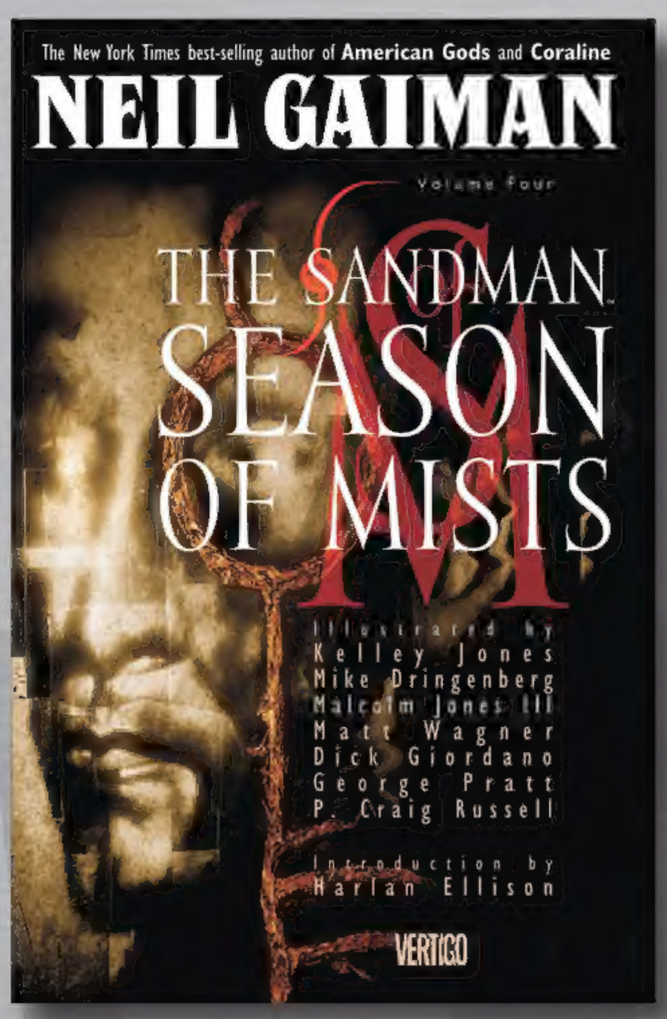

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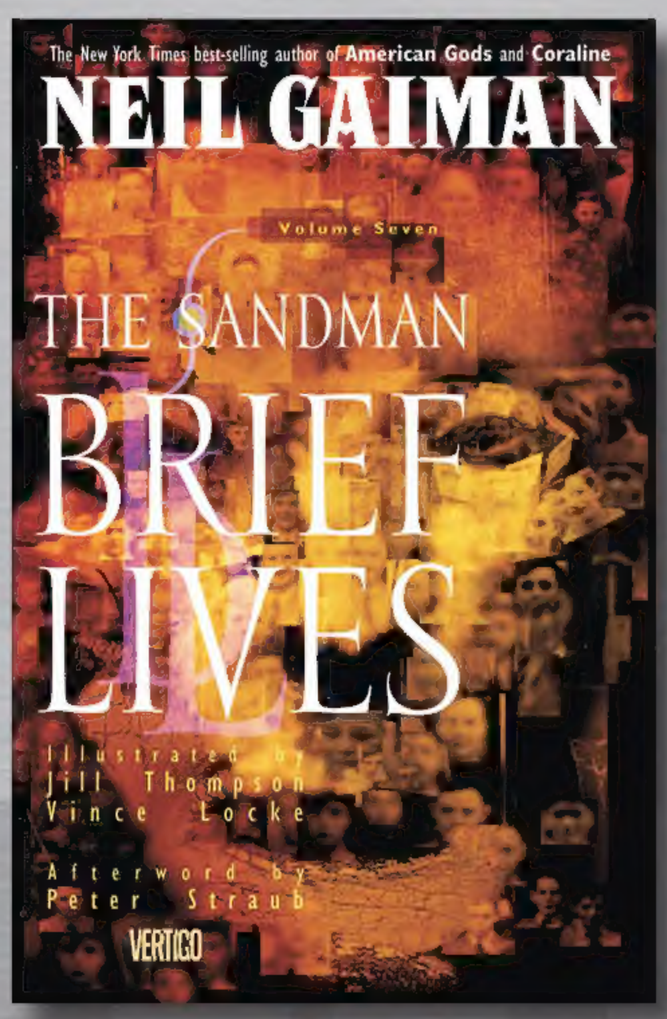

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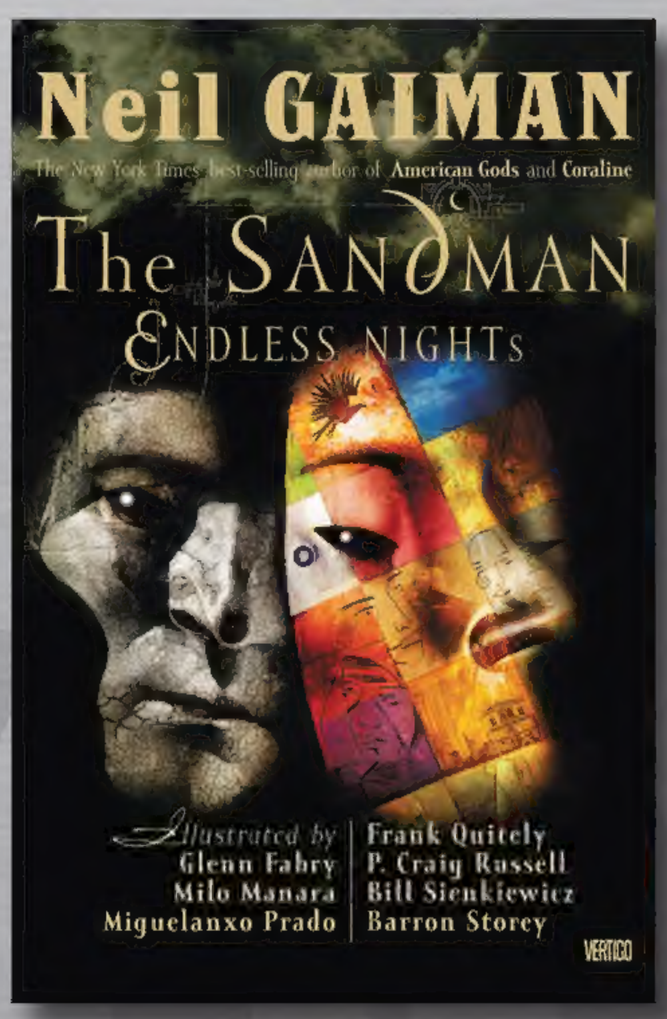

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